# Simeons – 13th March – St Mary’s Church, Stowe – Joseph Rhee

## How to grow as a Christian – Prayer – Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 11:1-4

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place.

When he finished, one of his disciples said to him,

‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’

He said to them,

‘When you pray, say:

‘ “Father,

hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. ” ’”

## Introduction

First of all I’d like to thank you for inviting me to preach here at St Mary’s today. It’s a privilege and honour to be given the chance to encourage you and explain to you what God has revealed to us in his Word.

In this second sermon in this series of “How to grow as a Christian” we’ll be thinking about prayer.

We can often overlook, misunderstand and feel distant from prayer. But prayer is such a big part of the Christian life. In church we pray corporately with collects and said prayers. Before meal times we pray as family and friends. And in Jesus’ life we see many times where he prays to his Father. So we can’t just ignore it and leave questions we might have unanswered.

Some might ask, who are we to pray to? Or how are we to pray? And also what do we pray for? So as we look at the Lord’s prayer written in Luke’s account of Jesus’ life, let’s try and answer some of our questions, remind ourselves of what prayer is about and see what Jesus teaches us about prayer.

But before we dive in, a quick note on the shorter version of the Lord’s prayer that we have here in Luke. We will be used to the longer version that we say in church taken from Matthew’s gospel, but here we think Luke’s version focuses on the heart of what the Lord’s prayer is about.

## Prayer is to our Father

So my first point for those who write notes is this: “Prayer is to our Father”.

Before Jesus came, God’s relationship with his people had distance. Even though God loved his people the same there was something getting in the way of a personal intimate relationship that Adam and Eve once enjoyed in the garden of Eden. That something was sin. A turning away from God and saying, “No thanks God, I’ll do things my way”.

This meant that the relationship between God and humankind was broken, and God’s perfect holiness and our sinfulness couldn’t come near each other. Sacrifices needed to be made to come near God and even then only one high priest could enter into God’s presence once a year.

So the fact that the Lord’s prayer starts off with the word, “Father” is revolutionary. Jesus is saying that now we can call God our Father. The personal, intimate and close family relationship is back! But how? If you look back to Luke chapter 10 verse 22, Jesus said that no-one knows who the Son is except the Father and no-one knows who the Father is except the Son (and here’s the important bit) and those to whom he chooses to reveal him. Jesus is the reason why we can know the Father and have this close relationship with him!

So what does that mean when we pray?

When I was younger my father tried to listen to whatever I had to say to him because he loved me. Whether it was when I asked for a younger sibling and then when my brother came along how I didn’t want a younger brother, I used to talk to my father about nearly everything. But why nearly? When I had done something wrong I thought that when he found out he wouldn’t love me anymore. Thankfully there weren’t times when my father didn’t love me but there were definitely times when he didn’t want to love me fully.

Now I know that this might not be the case for everyone here and that’s something right to be sad about as sin affects every relationship we have. But even as some of our fathers are like our heavenly father in character they only give us a tiny glimpse of Him. And to think that our heavenly father is only like our earthly fathers would be to miss the real deal. Our heavenly father is the perfect father who loves us all the time and listens to everything we have to say to him.

When we pray we shouldn’t be wary of what we ask for or what we tell God. He loves us and loves to hear us when we pray to him. So we can be confident that God is listening to us when we pray to our Father.

## Prayer is about God

Keeping this in mind let’s look at what Jesus teaches us first to pray about. The Lord’s prayer continues: “hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.” So my second point: “Prayer is about God”.

Notice the repetition of “your” in these first two phrases. After starting the prayer by addressing our Father, the focus doesn’t shift to us but to God. The first priority of our prayers should be God.

So what does “hallowed be your name” mean? It means that God’s name would be revered as holy. When we ask that God’s name would be hallowed we’re praying that God would continue his purpose of making his name known. We’re praying that people would come to know of God’s great name who is holy and wonderful. And we’re also looking forward to the time when all people will hallow God’s name when God has brought his kingdom.

So we also pray for God’s kingdom to come. But how do we know what the kingdom will be like? We look to the miracles Jesus performed and the life he lived. He healed the sick, drove out impure spirits, forgave sins and ate with the outcasts of society showing us that his kingdom will have no sickness, evil, sin and will be for everyone. This prayer isn’t causing God to bring his kingdom, as God has already promised to bring his kingdom, but instead we’re aligning our requests and desires with his.

When we pray we want to be praying about God and his will for our world. We want our desires to match God’s which is to bring the new Creation where everyone who puts their trust in Jesus will be able to experience new and eternal life with God. Now that’s something to look forward to in our prayers!

And what does this look like in practice? As I was preparing for this sermon, I realised that my prayers didn’t have the priorities that Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer. I’d often start by thanking God for doing something for me, asking God to help me with something or asking God to make something happen for me – the focus was on me, me, me. Now those aren’t bad things to pray about, as we’ll see next, but my priorities were not the same as Jesus’.

So instead I’ve been encouraged by the Lord’s Prayer to pray about God first. Rather than starting by praying about myself first I could pray for God’s name to be known by a friend of mine who I’ve been talking to recently or that God’s name would be known and hallowed in a certain country where the gospel is being preached by missionaries. As I pray for God’s kingdom to come, I could also thank God for his great kingdom and that more and more people would be able to enter it and come back to relationship with him now.

As we pray our first priority should be God. He has revealed to us his glorious name and is bringing his kingdom near so it’s right to thank him for he who is and also ask him to continue to bring his kingdom here on earth by bringing people back to Him.

## Prayer is about God and us

Now onto the last section of the Lord’s prayer: “Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.” So my last point is this: “Prayer is about God and us”.

Notice the focus now shifts to us. After praying about God the prayer turns to our needs, both physical and spiritual.

The petition of “Give us each day our daily bread” is a request that God would provide for the physical needs of his people. God doesn’t ignore our current needs. He provides us with what we need and sustains us. He is our loving father in heaven who doesn’t forget our needs. All of our needs are known by God and he provides lovingly when we ask him. So whether that be food, money or even the sunshine, he provides us with it. This why we say grace before meals to thank God for his grace in providing us with food from the earth. God the Father is active in this world and everything we have to live on is from him so we can be grateful to him for providing for us and ask him to continue to do that.

After addressing our physical needs the next petition is this: “Forgive us our sins”. When we say this we’re not asking God to deal with the problem of sin again, as Jesus has already died to pay the penalty for our sins. But instead just like in any relationship if there is wrongdoing against one person we can’t just go on ignoring the wrongdoing. The one who has committed the sin needs to say sorry and ask for forgiveness to maintain that relationship.

Going back to my father and me, if I had sinned against him I would apologise and ask him for forgiveness to maintain our relationship. If he were to ignore the sin altogether that would be foolish and a fake relationship. So just as my father forgives me to maintain our relationship, because he loves me, we should also ask God to forgive us for our sins. We do this as although the penalty is paid for our sins and we’ve been set free from sin we will still sin because we’re in a broken world.

And because of this we say the last petition: “And lead us not into temptation.” Jesus teaches us to ask God to lead us away from temptations to sin. God doesn’t tempt us, but sometimes he does test our faith to strengthen it.

So what does this petition look like? How does God lead us not into temptation? It’s by the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. After Jesus died and was raised God gave us his Spirit to give us new life and made it possible through the Spirit for us to commune with God in everything. So when we have faith in Jesus, or willingly serve God, or recoil from sin we’re enjoying the Spirit’s life. A lot of the time we might not feel that way but as we spend more and more time with God in his Word and in prayer he’ll continue to change us to be more and more like his Son. We can be bold in asking God to lead us away from temptation because he’s our Father and because he’s given us his Spirit.

After focusing on praying about God we can pray about God and us. Recently I had to think about what I’d do after graduating from university. So my prayers were centred on God providing me with a job next year and he did! Or even in the smallest of cases when I eat, I can thank God for providing me with food and drink and a roof over my head. I sing in a choir and I’ve been singing for a long time and I find it really easy to be prideful and selfish, so in my prayers I might say sorry to God for being selfish and that he’d forgive me so that we could maintain our relationship. And when I’m tempted to idolise things other than God like marriage, status or pleasure I might pray that God would lead me away from those temptations and turn me towards Him in scripture where I’m reminded that my worth and status before Him is unchanged by these things and that he still loves me in any situation.

## Conclusion

So to conclude. Jesus has taught us by the Lord’s prayer that firstly we are praying to our Father and that this completely changes the way we speak and relate to him. It helps us be bold in the way we pray about God and also about God and us. Just before Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord’s prayer he’s addressed the question of how to gain eternal life. The answer is Jesus so we can also boldy pray that God would grant us eternal life with him through Jesus.

So to finish let’s pray to God our Father. I’m going to read the Lord’s prayer leaving pauses after each line. And in those pauses we can make the Lord’s prayer our own by adding our own petitions in line with how Jesus taught us to pray.

Let’s pray:

Father,

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

Give us each day our daily bread

Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us

And lead us not into temptation

Amen